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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001307

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SUBJECT: UNDERLYING THE PLATEAU CONFLICT: WE'RE INDIGENES,
BUT YOU'RE SETTLERS

REF: A. ABUJA 1277

B. ABUJA 1278

C. ABUJA 1279

D. 2002 ABUJA 1397

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN CAMPBELL FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Summary. The communal crises in Nigeria, and particularly those in Plateau State, are much more complicated than mere ethno-religious violence: they can be traced to power struggles between "indigenes" (mostly Christian in Plateau State) and "settlers" (mostly Muslim Hausa/Fulani). Until the indigene-settler issue is resolved, tension is likely to remain high in Plateau State and throughout the country. This is the fourth of four Plateau State cables. End Summary.

Fanning the Flames: the Indigene-Settler Struggle

2. (U) Far from being strictly religious or ethnic as reported by some international media, communal crises throughout Nigeria are much more complex and problematic. The communal crisis in Plateau can be traced to a fierce power struggle between "indigenes" and "settlers." In the Nigerian context, an indigene is defined as anyone whose ancestors lived in the area. Settlers, as the name implies, are the late-comers. There is no firm agreement on the starting date for determining which is which, leading to much confusion. In Plateau State, ancient history indicates that all groups are settlers. Several hundred years ago, some groups began moving in, but the process was an ongoing one and continues today. While most claim that the Hausa/Fulani are "recent" arrivals, they have been present in Plateau State for at least 200 years and probably longer.

3. (U) The most recent conflict started in Jos in 2001 over the appointment of a "settler" by the GON to serve as the State coordinator for the government-funded poverty eradication program. Although the "indigenes" vehemently opposed the appointment, the Presidency refused to bow to their pressure, insisting that every Nigerian born and raised in any part of Nigeria can serve in any position. About 2000 people died during the resulting riots on September 7, 2001. The conflict later engulfed Wase, Lantang, Kanam, Shendam and Yelwa-Shendam.

4. (SBU) Until the Nigerian leaders properly address this issue, it will continue to constitute a spanner in the works of unity among Nigerians. It polarizes people and evokes deep emotions among different ethnic groups that have lived peacefully for many decades. Politicians exploit these divisions to advance their short term or selfish goals or maintain their hold on power. During elections, every group perfects its strategies to outwit the other, employing ethnic and religious cards to ensure victory. In the current political environment, this trend will likely continue, and perhaps worsen, without serious intervention by government at all levels, supported by the major ethnic interest groups such as the Arewa Consultative Forum, Ohaneze, and Afenifere.

5. (U) Some efforts are being made, but they are isolated and ineffective. In late June, Vice President Atiku Abubakar, while receiving a delegation from the Igbo Business Community residing in Lagos, described the contentious issue of "indigeneship/settlership" as unconstitutional, dangerous and divisive to the unity of Nigeria. "There are two words not in our law books or constitution and these words are settlers and indigenes. This government, therefore, is not prepared to promote that dichotomy in the country. We will employ all constitutional means to make sure every Nigerian feels secure at any place he decides to reside. That is what makes a country great and developed," Atiku stated while thanking the Igbo for contributing to the unity and economic development of Nigeria.

6. (C) President Obasanjo himself has repeatedly maintained that the constitution recognizes only Nigerian citizenship. However, both "settlers" and "indigenes" have blamed the constitution for recognizing both "citizenship" and "indigeneship" in the appointment of sensitive positions. For instance, Hausa/Fulani complained in Jos that certain government jobs required citizens to produce a certificate of

origin from the local government (LG). "Whenever our people go to the office of the LG Chairman, he would deny them the certificate on the pretext that there is no indigenous Hausa/Fulani community in Jos," Yaya Abubakar, a retired Muslim community leader averred. Others, such as the Emir of Dutse, have been vocal in asserting that any member of the community with only 3-5 years residence should be considered as "indigenes."

17. (U) NOTE: There are only two references to indigeneship in the 1999 Constitution. One is in section 147(3): "...the President shall appoint at least one Minister from each State, who shall be an indigene of such State." The other is in section 318(1), defining terms: "'belong to' or its grammatical expression when used with reference to a person in a state refers to a person either or whose parents or any of whose grand parents was a member of a community indigenous to that state." End NOTE.

Popular Definition of Indigenes and Settlers

18. (SBU) In Plateau State, the term "indigenes" is normally used to describe the non-Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups found scattered all over the State. They are predominantly Christians and animists, and on the basis of their indigeneship, they lay claims to all land, political power, and traditional authority. Often the "indigenes" consider Hausa/Fulani to be "settlers" whose ancestry had its roots not in Plateau but in other parts of the North like Kano and Sokoto.

19. (SBU) The term "settlers" is generally used for Hausa/Fulani, mostly found in urban centers. There are two types of Fulani: settled and nomadic. The settled Fulani are found in towns and cities living together with Hausa, who are mostly traders and artisans, while the nomadic Fulani are mobile, found in rural and remote villages guiding their flocks of cattle in search of greener pastures. Although Hausa and Fulani are separate and distinct ethnic groups, speaking languages as different as English and French, the two are lumped together by most observers because they share similar cultural and religious affinities.

Herein Lies the Rub

110. (C) The Hausa/Fulani own property and control commercial activities of Jos, Wase, Yelwa-Shendam and a host of other Plateau State towns. Their numerical strength, coupled with their economic power, has set them on a collision course with their indigenous neighbors over political leadership. As former Nigerian Ambassador to Switzerland Yahaya Kwande observed, "Their level of comfort in the society has drawn a lot of jealousy from the indigenous tribes." Kwande explained that western education provided by Christian missionaries in the mid-20th century had liberated the indigenous community, hitherto regarded as primitive and uncivilized: most of them had practiced nudity and eked out a living by subsistence farming, or working as household help to the Hausa/Fulani community. He suggested that elites from the indigenous tribes now use that historical relationship to blame the "settlers" for every problem the indigenous community faces.

111. (C) Historically, the Hausa/Fulani "settlers" have lived in Plateau State for over 100 years. They claimed that their grandfathers actually founded and developed these areas, arguing further that when their ancestors settled in these areas, the place was a virgin land and the so-called "indigenes" lived outside these areas. The "settlers" said that Jos was initially a territory under the control of Emir of Bauchi, a neighboring Fulani Emir and flag bearer of Sokoto Caliphate. According to Alhaji Saleh Hassan, spokesman for the Hausa/Fulani community and former National Chairman of the defunct Democratic Party of Nigeria (DBN), all the previous traditional rulers of Jos were Hausa/Fulani bearing the title of "Sarkin Jos" (Emir of Jos) until 1947, when the colonial authorities appointed "Gbong Gwom of Birom" (Chief of Birom) before eventually changing it to "Gbong Gwom of Jos." The change in title, explained Hassan, demonstrated that current claims by "indigenes" were built on a flimsy foundation: an arbitrary political decision made during colonial times.

Comment

112. (C) Although media reports typically characterize communal violence with words like "political," "ethnic," "economic," or "religious," the reality is that the complex indigene-settler issue is the foundation of the problems in Plateau State. Casual observers may find it easier to apply

familiar labels to the violence, but in order to understand the depth of the conflict, it is crucial to try to fathom the murky depths of the indigene-settler problem. Solving the problem will take continued efforts to revive Nigeria's adherence to the rule-of-law and regularize property rights and access to social services.

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